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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly reviews the history of special education and bilingual education, noting parallels and areas of mutual interest. The author cites the challenges involved in providing an appropriate bilingual multicultural education for handicapped children with linguistic differences, and emphasizes the importance of avoiding past mistakes in both bilingual and special education. He proposes three goals for the emerging field: the development of shared responsibility for the limited English proficient (LEP) handicapped child's education (including sharing of turf and avoiding the use of specialized jargon); the improvement of skills in working with LEP handicapped children; and the influencing of federal, state, and local policy related to appropriate service delivery to the populations. (CL)

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THE EXCEPTIONAL CHILD:

A NEW CHALLENGE FOR EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE

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It is really a pleasure to be here with all 650 of you supporters of bilingual special education. Coming to California is always very special and exciting for me. I say this because California is generally very innovative. Many new movements and creative approaches to various social issues have come from here. I was not surprised, for example, when I read in the Foresight Report, which is published in Stockholm, Sweden, that California along with Colorado, Florida, and Connecticut are the leading states in the sense of being trend setters in the area of social policy and practice. The trend setting, cutting edge type of leadership is certainly being demonstrated here this morning. This conference is a dream come true for those of us who are concerned and committed to the improvement of educational programs for exceptional children who are also of limited English proficiency (LEP).

As a state, you have certainly come a long way in the past ten years relative to the bilingual special education movement. Approximately ten years ago, I was in San Diego participating in one of the very first National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE) conferences. At that meeting, there was enthusiastic support and interest in bilingual education. I was unable at that time, however, to find any workshops or sessions directly related to bilingual special education. I did attend two very fine sessions that were indirectly related. The first was by Dr. Ed DeAvila and Dr. Joe Ulibarri

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on the Multicultural Assesment Project and the second on the litigation addressing the inappropriate testing, labeling, and placement of Chicano children into classes for the educable mentally retarded. This session was conducted by Dr. Henry Casso.

Today's conference, however, has a total of sixteen workshops for you to choose from. Dr. Ochoa, Ms. Vasquez, and Dr. Hurtado, the conference coordinators, along with the planning committee, are to be commended for their comprehensive approach in planning and implementing this meeting. Looking at the program, it becomes apparent that there is something for everyone. There are, for example, strands on assessment, administration, parent/community, instructional issues and methodologies. I personally am looking forward to participating in the maximum number of workshops and wish I could attend all sixteen.

The title of my presentation is "The Exceptional Bilingual Child: A New Challenge for Exceptional People." I would like you to focus your attention for a few moments on two key words in this title, namely, child and people. I am referring to the child who, through no fault of his/her own, is physically or psychologically impaired. This child or student, however, also happens to be of limited English proficiency. The people I am referring to are you and I, that is, first and foremost you the parents, then the rest of us teachers, aides, administrators, psychologists, social workers, diagnosticians, speech and language specialists, and other auxiliary support personnel. We are not only allies, but we are partners and we share the responsibility with you parents of providing a free and appropriate bilingual special education for your child. If we join our hearts and hands and do this together, we can help realize this goal of equal educational opportunity as well as equal educational benefits for all of our nation's children.

I have used the term bilingual special education. Does this mean that

we have a new field or specialization within education? Before I give you my answer to this rhetorical question, let me first back up a bit and talk about the development of special education. There was a time when special education was a little known and often misunderstood emerging discipline. It was not until after World War II that special education programs and classes in the public schools began to increase dramatically. This embryonic movement received a big push and a great deal of support from the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1964 and its various subsequent amendments.

In 1974, President Gerald Ford signed into law the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142). This is the most dramatic and comprehensive special education legislative enactment to date. With the passage of P.L. 94-142 came, what I would refer to as, the golden age of special education. Those of you who were special education teachers in the 50's and the 60's will remember what it was like teaching in church basements, old army barracks, Quonset huts, and so forth. You will also remember how we were isolated and excluded oftentimes in the faculty lounge, at faculty meetings, and other school activities.

Bilingual education has also gone through a similar developmental pattern as an emerging discipline since the passage of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and the many subsequent State bilingual education laws. Bilingual education has come a long way since 1968, but it has not quite reached its golden age in terms of support, acceptance, and status. This is perhaps why it is such a rigorous and dynamic discipline today.

A coalition between special educators and bilingual educators was considered impossible by most educators ten years ago. Linguistically different parents and their children have historically been very apprehensive, to say the least, about having anything to do with special education. This was, of course, due

to the problems of improper assessment, labeling, and placement of many students. Today, however, the pendulum has moved to the other side. There is now talk of underinclusion of LEP students in special education. Children with special education needs, who are dominant in a language other than English, are not being properly or appropriately taught in our schools. More and more people are calling for a bilingual approach to special education.

In the early days of special education, a very interesting article appeared in the literature. The title of the article was "What Is Special About Special Education?" The article raised some thought provoking questions about the identity of special education and its relationship to regular education. As bilingual educators, many of us have also been asked this same question. What is special about bilingual education? I am sure that everyone of us here today could list a number of things that are very positive and special about special education. Likewise, all of us could mention many of the beneficial aspects of bilingual education. Even though special education is targeted primarily at handicapped children, and bilingual education is targeted primarily at non-handicapped children, both disciplines are special because they comprise people who value individual differences and who seek to maximize each student's strengths as a learner.

Let us return now to our rhetorical question. Do we now have a new discipline and specialization within education called Bilingual Special Education? Yes, I believe we do. Your enthusiastic support of this conference through your presence is an affirmation of this. This conference, of course, is not an isolated effort. The Lau Centers in Milwaukee and Miami have also sponsored Bilingual Special Education conferences. Professional organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA), the National Association of Bilingual Education

(NABE), the International Reading Association (IRA), and others are including Bilingual Special Education in their meetings and conventions, not only in terms of workshops and symposis, but also through special interest groups and special projects.

It is certainly exciting to be part of an emerging discipline and a new specialization. The merging of the best and most successful practices of special education with the best and most effective practices of bilingual education, certainly should improve the opportunities and services provided to handicapped children who come to our schools with limited English proficiency and a broad range of native language skills and communicative abilities. As you can see, we are faced with a tremendous challenge.

This challenge of providing an appropriate bilingual multicultural education for handicapped children who are also linguistically different requires a great deal of responsibility from all of us. First of all, we have the responsibility of learning from our past mistakes in both bilingual and special education. We cannot, for example, put an undue amount of energy into creating and proliferating another large categorical program. This would result in fiscal irresponsibility as well as harm to children. We must avoid at all costs the further unnecessary fragmentation of children's education. In addition to learning from our past mistakes, we must venture into the uncharted waters of the future. In so doing, I would like to encourage you to pursue the three following goals:

The first goal is the development of shared responsibility for the LEP handicapped child's education. In other words, how do we work together? First, we must be willing to put the child and his/her parents first and our specialized profession second. We have to share the turf. We must start talking to one another in plain Spanish or English and not in our specialized

jargon and educationese. We need to promote the development of new educational coalitions with parents, aides, teachers, specialized auxiliary personnel, and policymakers. We must be open to change and new approaches. We should be able to admit that we do not always have the answer but that we are willing to work together to find it.

The second goal I would like to encourage you to pursue is the improvement of your skills for working with LEP handicapped children. Staff development and inservice training should be reciprocal. Bilingual teachers should learn special education techniques and approaches from their special education peers and vice versa. I know that some of you have already participated in your State Department of Education's sponsored cross-disciplinary training in bilingual special education, both in Mexico as well as here in California. I would suggest that you explore different ways of teaming with and exchanging classes with other teachers and specialists in your building and district. In one of the sessions Olivia Martinez will share how some of this is being done in the San Jose public schools.

Finally, I encourage all of you to do your part in influencing policy related to the provision of quality services for LEP handicapped children. Sometimes it is merely a matter of requesting clarification of existing federal, state, and local policies. Other times it requires highly organized efforts of educating and convincing board members, legislators, and school administrators of the obligation and benefit of providing linguistically and culturally appropriate learning opportunities.

In closing, I would like to encourage you to continue the excellent job you have begun of providing an appropriate bilingual educational opportunity to your handicapped students, who are also of limited English proficiency. In working at this tremendous challenge you are truly becoming exceptional people.